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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Rev. Thad Austin, Associate Pastor of the First Methodist Church in Murfreesboro, TN.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O Lord, in whom we find life, bind our Nation to You. Make us a people devoted to prayer. Tame our wandering hearts and help us discover the meaning of freedom, justice, and mercy. Help our people to have the faith to seek You and the grace to pray for our enemies.

Lord, this is a solemn and holy day. Today, we celebrate a saint of Your church. May the virtues that St. Patrick embodied be instructive to us. For despite adversity, Patrick helped others find good news, and his actions changed a society.

May our lawmakers, like Patrick, grow in their love for You and their service to others. Enable them to see beyond the positions that divide this body and help them to long after humility, piety, and shared purpose.

Increase our faith, O Lord, and help our unbelief. Rouse our spirits and make us one Nation under You.

Eternal Father, Spirit, Word, we praise You, the Lord and light of our salvation. Hear our prayer, O Lord.

Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable TOM UDALL led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. INOUE).

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 17, 2011.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

Mr. UDALL thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

GUEST CHAPLAIN REV. THAD AUSTIN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it was a great honor to have the Reverend Thad Austin, of the First United Methodist Church in Murfreesboro, TN, provide the opening prayer this morning. I thank him for his wise words. Remembering the St. Patrick in St. Patrick's Day was a wonderful way to begin the session.

I first met the Reverend Austin at his alma mater, Asbury University in Wilmore, KY, when I visited there in 2007. Asbury University's mission is to engage the world and serve the Word through public service. Our guest Chaplain today has pursued that mission with great success.

Maybe it is a family calling. The Reverend Austin's grandfather, Dr. Edward U. Austin, was an admiral in the

U.S. Navy who volunteered overseas as a medical missionary. His father, Stephen B. Austin, is a doctor who cares for our Nation's veterans.

They taught Thad that it was important to serve others—that in a nation that so generously provides what many in other parts of the world do not enjoy, it is important to give back.

The Reverend Austin has taken that advice very much to heart. He is still a young man, but he has accomplished a great deal. And he is not one to look back with pride on where he has been, but rather, look forward to all that he has left to do.

The Reverend Austin earned his degrees from Asbury University and the Asbury Theological Seminary, and he has also studied at Oxford University and the Wesley Theological Seminary here in the Nation's Capital. He is the pastor of congregational care at the First United Methodist Church, as well as a commissioned Elder there.

The Reverend Austin has preached in England, South Korea, and Mexico as well as in Kentucky, Tennessee, and several other States, and provided spiritual guidance and volunteer work in Mexico, Guatemala, Kentucky, and Tennessee. And while he has clearly gone on to do bigger and bolder things, let me also note that in 2009 he served as an intern in my office.

ADM Edward Austin, whose grandson has just addressed the Senate Chamber, is buried at Arlington. Our own Senate Chaplain Barry Black, also a Navy admiral, delivered his interment service. And I know Chaplain Black is just as pleased to have the Reverend Austin here with us today as I am.

Once again let me say it was a true honor to listen to the Reverend Austin's words this morning. I want to thank him for taking time from his important work to be here. And I thank him for his lifetime of service to his community and our Nation.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I join Senator McConnell in welcoming Reverend Austin from Murfreesboro, TN, just down the road from Nashville. He formerly worked here, as Senator McConnell said. We are delighted he has this privilege today to pray at the beginning of the Senate, which is something that has happened since the beginning of the Senate, since the very first days of the Senate. I thank him for taking his time to be here. Welcome.

Mr. President, will the Chair let me know when I have consumed 8 minutes?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Yes.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, this is St. Patrick's Day, as Reverend Austin mentioned, and we celebrate that. We are coming up on another important anniversary, and that is the anniversary of the enactment of the health care law, which the majority regards as a historic achievement and most Republicans regard as a historic mistake.

I want to talk a little bit about that law, but there is another anniversary I remember very well that came a few days before enactment of the health care law—the so-called health care summit that was held at the Blair House. It was a remarkable event.

The President of the United States, who is highly intelligent and well-versed on health care, invited a bunch of us down to discuss health care. He stayed and we stayed for 6 or 7 hours. During that discussion, it was a pretty free exchange. I especially remember one of them. I had been asked by Senator McConnell and Representative Boehner to represent Republicans in presenting our side, and the President's invitation gave us a platform we usually don't have. He has a better platform than we do most of the time.

We made our argument that we would prefer an approach on health care that instead of expanding the health care delivery system, which we all know costs too much, we should go step by step to reduce the cost of health care so more people can afford to buy insurance. That was the basic discussion we had. We got down to some facts. I had said that, according to the CBO, the President's plan would raise individual premiums and make insurance cost more for individuals who buy insurance by 10 to 13 percent. The President said, after I finished:

So, Lamar, when you mentioned earlier that you said premiums go up—that's just

not the case, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

I said:

Mr. President, if you're going to contradict me, I ought to have a chance to respond. The Congressional Budget Office report says that premiums will rise in the individual market as a result of the Senate bill.

The President said:

No, no, no, no—let me—and this is an example of where we've got to get our facts straight.

I said:

That's my point.

And it went on from there. I had to make a decision at that moment whether I should continue to have a public disagreement with the President. I thought I was right, and he thought he was right, so I decided it would be more appropriate for me not to do that in public, to let other Senators and Congressmen have their say. I exchanged a letter with the President that day, and I came to the floor of the Senate later that week to make my argument on why I believed premiums would go up.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the transcript of my exchange with the President and that of Senator KYL and a couple of Members of Congress and the letter I sent to the President that day which made my point rather than publicly argue with him. My remarks I made on the floor of the Senate later that day are in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

THE WHITE HOUSE

DISCUSSION ON COST CONTAINMENT AT BIPARTISAN MEETING ON HEALTH CARE REFORM
(Blair House, Feb. 25, 2010)

(ROUGHLY 11 A.M.)

THE PRESIDENT: For folks who even with those lower costs still can't afford coverage, we'd provide some subsidies. But here's what I want to emphasize is that even without the subsidies it's estimated by the Congressional Budget Office that the plan we put forward would lower the costs in the individual market for the average person who's just trying to buy health insurance and they don't—they're not lucky enough to work for a big company, would lower their costs by between 14 and 20 percent.

So, Lamar, when you mentioned earlier that you said premiums go up—that's just not the case, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

SENATOR ALEXANDER: Mr. President, if you're going to contradict me, I ought to have a chance to—the Congressional Budget Office report says that premiums will rise in the individual market as a result of the Senate bill.

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, no, no—let me—and this is an example of where we've got to get our facts straight.

SENATOR ALEXANDER: That's my point.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, exactly. So let me respond to what you just said, Lamar, because it's not factually accurate. Here's what the Congressional Budget Office says. The costs for families for the same type of coverage as they're currently receiving would go down 14 to 20 percent. What the Congressional Budget Office says is, is that because now they've got a better deal be-

cause policies are cheaper, they may choose to buy better coverage than they have right now and that might be 10 to 13 percent more expensive than the bad insurance that they had previously. But they didn't say that the actual premiums would be going up. What they said was they'd be going down by 14 to 20 percent. And I promise you, I've gone through this carefully with the Congressional Budget Office. And I'll be happy to present this to the press and whoever is listening, because this is an important issue.

SENATOR ALEXANDER: Well, may I—may I—

THE PRESIDENT: Let me just finish, Lamar. Now, the—what we've done is we've tried to take every single cost containment idea that's out there. Every proposal that health care economists say will reduce health care costs, we've tried to adopt in the various proposals. There are some additional ideas that Republicans have presented that we think are interesting and we also tried to include. So, let me give you an example.

You mentioned the idea of buying across state lines, insurance. That's something that I've put in my proposal that's actually in the Senate proposal. I think that it shows some promise. You mentioned that as—that Mike Enzi has previously said, that he's interested in small businesses being able to pool in the equivalent of some sort of exchange. So that's where there's some overlap.

But I just think it's very important to understand that what we've done is to try to take every single cost containment idea that's out there and try to adopt it in this bill. What I'd like to do is to see if we can proceed and have a very concrete conversation about what are the ideas that you guys have that you don't think are in our bill to contain costs. And what I want to do is to see if maybe we can adopt some of those or refine what we've already done in order to further reduce costs.

SENATOR ALEXANDER: Mr. President, I've had my time—

THE PRESIDENT: And what I'd like to do also is to make sure that you maybe suggest some of the ideas that are currently in the bill that you think are good, because, Lamar, in your opening introduction, what I saw was sort of a—the usual critique of why you thought it was bad. But as I said, we've adopted a lot of the ideas that we've heard from your side of the aisle. So I hope maybe you could say, well, those are the ones that we think are good ideas; here are the things that we think are bad ideas, as opposed to just painting in broad brush. Go ahead.

SENATOR ALEXANDER: Mr. President, let me—let me show some respect for my colleagues here. They're all here eager to speak, all sure they could do a better job than I could on any of these points. And what I would like to do is get back directly to you with why I believe—with respect—you're wrong about the bill. Your bill would increase premiums, I believe; you say it wouldn't. So rather than argue with you in public about it, I'd like to put my facts down, give them to you. Maybe other colleagues will say that. As far as Mike Enzi's proposal, he is ready to talk about it; others are.

THE PRESIDENT: Good.

SENATOR ALEXANDER: So I appreciate the opportunity that Mitch and John gave me to talk. You've made some interesting points, and why not let other members of Congress have a chance to talk.

THE PRESIDENT: I think it's a great idea. I'd like to get this issue settled about whether premiums are reduced before we leave today, because I'm pretty certain I'm not wrong. And you give us the information—and we're going to be here all afternoon. I promise you we'll get this settled before the day is out. All right.